

THE ENHANCEMENT OF SPACES IN BETWEEN BUILDINGS AS URBAN RECREATION DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT:

ABSTRACT: *Whenever developers or building owners develop a specific parcel of land, the focus of the development is mainly within their boundaries. The space left in between buildings is just enough to allow fire engine to access. Besides fire requirement, space in between buildings is to fulfil the minimum distance requirement by the local authority. As a consequence of that; the space in between buildings is only a space without proper intention. It is a leftover space without designated function. Examples of such spaces area are the rear, the side of buildings and under the flyovers or bridges. Even though most of local controller have their own expert advisory-committee, it doesn't mean the whole city development is well taken-care. Without any awareness on the significance of such spaces; the space will be occupied by a group of the urban community for their own personalisation space. To some extends they used those spaces for negative activities. If this continuous; the city safety, security and surveillance will be threatened. Therefore, in line with the acceleration of urban transition for mega-city in the East Coast Economic Region; it is a call for multi disciplinarians to focus on the future of those spaces in the city.*

Keywords: *public space, negative space, positive space, revitalization, urban recreation development*

1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of space in between building is an urban outdoor public realm beyond the private premises. It is an outdoor area in which sculpture or public activity may take into scene. The area has potential for great use in the urban infill especially if it is located within the packed and high density city. For instance; walking experience through the city will enhance the awareness on the number of nice spaces in between buildings for people to chill in and out. However, the experience will be disturbed by negative scenes in the public place. The negative scene could be a description of space which is visually and physically caused a hindrance to our senses. Since our present public is now more selective on what they experience in the city, therefore the space shall be revitalized for more economical and beneficial. The approach of revitalizing the public space has been realized as methods of promoting cities for economic growth by most urban developers. Hence, this approach shall be complied in the new coming mega-cities as well as in the existing heritage cities.

2. THE ISSUE

In most developed cities in the developed countries, the city manager and public had realized that the leftover spaces in between buildings provide cities with potentials and threats. The potential was on the revitalization of small urban public spaces to further dynamism the city citizen. On the other hand the leftover space without any objective threatened city safety and security. Since most of the developing cities in the developing countries; the development execution limited within the ownership boundary, therefore: the public realm were left inferior to other spaces. In the new coming mega-city a paradigm shift must be made. The importance of the space in between buildings as public realm shall be realized by city stake holders, managers and end users. It shall be considered as part of the micro-development of the East Coast Economic Region's (ECER) and not after-thought design. Therefore, it is a call to enhance the space in between buildings for revitalization.

3. REVIEW: THE SCENARIO OF SPACES IN BETWEEN BUILDINGS

There are variety of sizes and locations of those spaces elsewhere in the city. Some are spacious and some are smalls. The spaces in between buildings are mostly found in between, in front, at the sides and at the rear of buildings. Due to the variety of sizes and location of those spaces; the degree of surveillance also varies accordingly.

The more surveillance area is, the more secure the space will be. According to Bently et. al. (1987); if comparison were made between an isolated and an exposed area; the degree of surveillance was much higher for more visually-accessible area. Therefore, it is an advantage to allow pedestrians and end users to pass by or circulate around the space in between buildings. The activity of meandering around buildings can be programmed as part of the overall urban recreation development.

Plate 1: The illustration of the space in between buildings in Banda Hilir, Melaka



In most cases, it was reported that most of the non-surveillance spaces have high tendencies for negative functions. In fact, the spaces mostly functioned as rubbish collection space and storage of non-used items. For instance, those spaces were the homeless and smugglers meeting points. In summary, the poor surveillance spaces in between buildings became a venue for crimes events such as pick pocketing, smuggling, drug trafficking and drug-addicts gathering.

3.1 The Street

Most of the spaces in between row of buildings in most of cities in Malaysia were functioned as streets. According to Abbaszadeh, F. (2007): the physical components of the street are identified in the survey have been group into seven categories: building, location, landscape, street furniture, street design, traffic system and quality of view. Those seven components were the attributor to the character of the space whether it either livelier or die. In terms of street elements Abbaszadeh, F. (2007) had identified nine elements of the street as: height and size of the facade, scale of the facade, architecture style and decorative elements of the facade, colour of the facade, information and advertisement signage of the facade, language of the sign board, illumination of the facade, street furniture style of the facade and the activity in between the facades. Therefore, for positive city image all the nine elements shall be considered for revitalization.

Plate 2: The lively space in between buildings in Jonker Street, Melaka with linear roadside -market



3.3 The Character of the Wall

The characteristic of the space in between building are highly influenced by the architecture style of the surrounding buildings' facades. For example, the space in between a row of historical buildings affected the spirit of surrounding spaces due to the image of heritage. If the surrounding

buildings are institutional type with formal function therefore; the space in between will reflect the formality. In short, the physical setting of the surrounding buildings has high influence to the spirit of space proportionately. The character of the wall orchestrates the psychology of the space in between.

3.4 The 'sky' treatment of the outdoor space

The sky of the outdoor space for spaces in between buildings also played an important role in quality of the space. For instance if the space in between buildings is linked with decorated with Chinese lantern; it creates the mood of Chinese festival. On the other hand, if the same space is sky-linked with 'ketupat' lantern, it enhanced the Malay festive mood!

3.5 The Visual Perspective

The visual quality as perceived by the end users depends on the combination of experience of viewing and moving in the city. The end user's experience used to combine the memory of indoor and outdoor spaces in the city. The overall perceptions on the city atmosphere on indoor and outdoor views of spaces are subject to the end users' personal judgement. Then, end users will decide to accept to reject the quality of the city. Therefore, a proper strategy shall be planned to ensure that the collection of personal perceptions by every end users are recorded as positive as possible. This is due to the fact that the individual perception may lead to the communal perception and hence the communal perception may lead to the overall image and identity of the city.

3.6 The Psychology of Environment

The quality of indoor spaces in the city in most city development were taken care by the individual owner, but the quality of outdoor spaces is whose responsibility? If there is one care about the future of the space; sooner or later the indoor quality which established by the private property development might be affected by the outdoor threat. This close relationship between indoor and outdoor adjacent urban context indicated that the psychology of city environment is closely-knitted together the indoor and outdoor space context.

4.0 THE NATURE OF SPACE IN BETWEEN BUILDINGS

The nature of work as architects used to focus on micro-development. On the other hand; town planners used to focus on the macro-development of the city. The overlapping of focuses is objectively to detail-up the development into more specific document. However, there is human error of an overlooked-space which occurred unintentionally. This is due to the execution of the

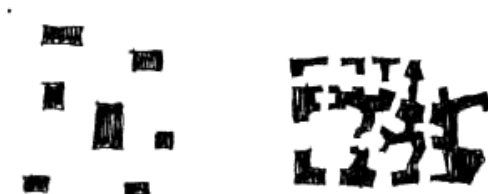
development proposals are in the scale-down basis. On the other hand, in reality the end users' perception is at one to one scale. Consequently, there is human error due to the transition of scale from the reality to the development proposal and vice-versa in the development execution.

Instead, Alexander (1997) claimed that the existence of the space in between buildings was due to the degree of enclosure of those spaces. The degree of enclosure of the space in between buildings determined the quality of the space. The more enclosed-space could be considered as more positive space as compared to the less enclosed or partly enclosed space. Hence, the degree of enclosure shall be controlled at preliminary stage of design.

In perceiving spaces in between buildings, Alexander (1997) agreed that there are two different kinds of outdoor spaces: negative space and positive space. However, he regarded the outdoor space as negative when the space is a free space or shapeless without enclosure. For example, an outdoor space is positive when it has a distinct, definite shape of the surrounding enclosure. As definite shape of a room defined the quality of an indoor space, therefore the shape for outdoor space in between buildings is as important as the shapes of the buildings which surround it. The following figure demonstrates the kinds of space which have entirely different plan geometries, which may be most easily distinguished the quality space indoors and outdoors due to the enclosure factor.

Figure 1: The plan of space in between buildings: without enclosed and with enclosed geometry.

(Sourced of illustration: Alexander, Christopher. (1997). A Pattern Language)



4.1 The physical component

The first phase of the research is to identify the physical component of the space in between buildings from the literature review. In the data collection most of the result in content analysis resulted with the space in between buildings space was made up of five basic components. The basic components were: the top and bottom horizontal component; the two-vertical component of the walls and one component of the end of the visual plane.

The bottom horizontal component functioned as the street or the main traffic circulation and the human circulation in the city. The top horizontal component is the sky of the street. The two-vertical components of the space were the facades of the row of the buildings in perspective view. The fifth component is the back plane where the diminishing point lies in the observer's viewing angle.

4.2 The geometry of parallel wall

According to Alexander (1997); the existence of the negative and positive spaces was due its geometry of the enclosure in terms of physical form and physical size of the space in between buildings. The geometrical form of space leads to the activity of the space. For example, the space with geometry of parallel wall with open-ended path of buildings had limited the space for any activities except side walking. The sidewalks are too tight to fit in a minimum of two persons passing-by. The size reflected the space as after-thoughts design and not built with the end users in mind. The alternative functions for the space is that the space could be occupied for landscaping purposes and limit to pedestrian only.

Plate 3: The illustration of a tight space in between buildings



4.3 Left-over space

The reality of the existence of space in between buildings was due to many reasons such as unplanned space in the macro-development. The space became a left-over space in the execution of the city development. Those areas were uneconomical to be gazetted for any development. In most cases, this area was dedicated for passive green area by the local authority. However, at the actual implementation on site was a space without proper designation for public acknowledgement. Without proper designation of function has lead the end-users used the space for rubbish-disposal or short-cut walkway to access to the back lane.

4.4 Danger space

The danger spaces in between buildings could be created due to its location and function but not due non-thoughtful design. Open and public space can be a hazardous space if located adjacent to high-risk zone such as open space around power sub-station, oxidation pond, accident-prone area, construction sites, electrical pylons, and deep monsoon drain. In most cases, those areas were dedicated for passive green area by the planning department of the local authority. To avoid public access those spaces shall be buffered and posted with safety signage for public consciousness of such spaces in the city.

4.5 Set-back space

The road, river and building set-back or reserved areas were also considered as negative space. Those spaces were owned by the local authority for future use such as road widening or river embankment. However, the function was not acknowledged to public and often misinterpreted as negative space. The space was left without poor maintenance caused the public to perceive the area as uneconomical space. Due to those misperceptions lead some of city end-users to occupy it creatively for charging public who park in this area. They benefited themselves as the parking manager by collecting charges from public.

4.6 Non-illuminated space

The identified space in between buildings could be considered as a negative space due to its low-illumination. The level of brightness has been considered as one of the factors that contributes to the liveliness and deadness of the space. In night time, those unlighted space might risk the end users' safety. They were exposed to any possibility of crime in the darkness of the city night.

4.6 Non-surveillance space

The non-illuminated and isolated spaces from pedestrian and vehicular circulation were beyond visual surveillance. The examples for this area were the rear of the buildings without island-access or basement parking. Those were another spot for crime scenes and negative activities.

5. DISCUSSION: THE QUALITY OF SPACES IN BETWEEN BUILDINGS

The nature of spaces in between buildings either positive or negative varies according the size, location and physical setting of the surrounding buildings. Newman (1972) encompassed that the feeling of “ownership” or responded as “personalization” by Bently et.al.(1987) which both agreed that the positive psychological feeling shall be encouraged as part of the aims in the design development. This personalization could be developed in the space in between buildings for urban recreation development strategies. Generally, the following strategies of enhancement for the space in between buildings shall be applied in the ECER city development; in envisaging the city as an ‘outdoor living room’ for public recreation development:

5.1 Meeting Point

The space in between building can function as meeting point. This idea works if the outdoor space is a visually and physically accessible for public gathering. Besides that, the space in between buildings could function as a landmark of a meeting point. Examples of this meeting point are the Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur, Dataran Helang in Langkawi, Dataran Pahlawan in Melaka and Dataran Ipoh in Perak. In revitalizing such spaces, the identification of such spaces is to ensure that the physical components, the accessibility, the degree of enclosure and the geometry are appropriate for meeting point purpose.

5.2 Waiting Point

With an efficient public transport system in the city, it makes long commutes more bearable. It is more pedestrian-friendly if the spaces in between buildings offered the pedestrian its function as space for sitting back with a take-out coffee and chill for a bit while waiting for the next bus. The place can become a breath-taking space before catching a crowded train. With this kind of approach the space could be experienced by the end users of regular travelers and tourists as a relief space. It is non-costly ‘breathing space’ could be considered as recreation activities for urban citizens while commuting to their destinies.

5.3 Outdoor Eating

The space in between buildings such as covered or uncovered sidewalks can be turned to a nice outdoor eating space. The city of Amsterdam in Holland and the Venice in Italy are examples of cities that the visitors commemorated their experience of walking through spaces of active theme cafes besides the curvilinear canals. Battery Park City in New York and Bintang Walk in Kuala Lumpur were part of the urban recreations development of road-sidewalk cafés which revitalized the night-life culture in those cities.

5.4 Pedestrian Mall

Petaling Street and Chow Kit Road in Kuala Lumpur, Lebuhraya in Penang and Jonker Street in Malacca are examples of pedestrian malls in Malaysia. Small retailers were selling their goods including fast foods, fruits, accessories, watches, handbags and souvenirs along the road sides in between two rows of buildings. The continuity of the outdoor shopping activities had extended the indoor shopping activities. The continuous link between the indoor and the outdoor of the shopping activities will create the liveliness in the whole space in between buildings. The idea of linear shopping activity in the Bazaar Ramadhan in the month of Ramadhan in Muslim calendar in most cities in Malaysia were part of the success strategies of enhancing the space in between buildings.

Plate 4: The illustration of a busy open -sky urban pedestrian mall



5.5 Art Appreciation

The great thing is on a regulation applied in certain parts of the cities such as in the city of New York and Gangnam in Korea, in which regulated all buildings frontage must have their own outdoor sculptures for public art appreciation. Since art is one of the important artistic element that gives a cultural expression to the life of a city; the regulation is sound tangible to enhance the space in front of buildings for art appreciation. The following illustrations are just a sampling of the hundreds of sculptures in the Gangnam city.

Plate 5: The emptiness of space in between building can be filled for sculpture appreciation (Source: <http://kauero.inigo-tech.com/blogs/topic>)



5.6 Display Parade

In Rantau Panjang, Kelantan the space in between buildings allowed the end users to appreciate the product display for sale. In fact, the approach of selling product along the parade has considered as conventional way of business promotion. This promoting product will enhance further the space in front and in between commercial buildings for positive function as part of urban recreation activities.

Plate 6: The display parade in front of shop houses in Rantau Panjang Kelantan



Plate 7: The souvenir display in front of shop houses in Banda Hilir Melaka



5.7 Photo-taking Point

Part of the urban recreation activities used to be done by the end users such as tourists or visitors to the city is taking photographs. The space in between buildings shall cater this kind of activity within the city outdoors. By providing a small space to accommodate for this kind of function will

increase the sense of personalization among the visitors. With this kind of outdoor space it will allow the end users to perceive the city image and identity in a more enjoyable manner.

Plate 8: The steps in front of building can be used for photo-taking to take place



5.8 Active Landscape: Interactive Exercise-Prop

Walking is a simple exercise. The space in between buildings may allow shaded space in between for self-help cardiac activity. The activity may take place for non-vehicular space by locating the exercise props or just safe space for walking. This enhancement could be applied for urban residential and commercial area which might help the heart-problem citizen to have preventive measures activity. For the space in between building located in working zone it could be enhanced for walking activity. The strategy could help the city citizen to upgrade their quality of life through healthy lifestyles.

5.9 Interactive Advert-info Billboard

In our present digital era; an interactive information and advertisement shall occupy the space in between buildings located at the danger zone area. Since, the space is not suitable for public access therefore the space can be useful for advertisement purposes. This area will benefit the end users or tourists by the provision of interactive information on the city

programs and advertisement of the recent products. Besides that, illumination from the billboard is also useful for lighting up the surrounding area in night time.

5.10 Activated Pavement/Green

The tight-space in between building has it's a hope for enhancement. The space shall be provided with illuminated pavement or boulevard. The cost of simple streetscape is very cheap as compared to the benefit of increasing the safety of the end users during night walking activities in the city.

6. CONCLUSION

Finally, the enhancement of small urban public space in between buildings should be treated as 'a revitalization of city outdoor living room'. Hopefully, before the new mega-city really takes place in our city, it is not too late to enhance the idea of prioritizing the public space. The public space including the space in between buildings shall be enhanced for the future city's outdoor experience in the urban recreation development. With that awareness among the city stakeholders, city manager, the sense of personalization among all the city users will be increased and the pride of being part of the city citizen will soon be elevated. Thus, the positive feeling among the citizen will lead to the promotion of the city image and identity. Even though, mega-city is the dream, the future of the humanity at ground zero shall not be jeopardized!!

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